

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE JASPER COUNTY COUCL**  
**MARCH 21, 2017**

**PAGE 21**

The Jasper County Council met this date at 7:00 P.M. C.S.T. in the Commissioners Room, Suite 202, of the Jasper County Courthouse located at 115 West Washington Street, Rensselaer, Indiana, with the following members present: Rein Bontreger, Stephen Jordan, Gerrit H. DeVries, Gary Fritts, Paul Norwine and Brett Risner. Also present were Kimberly K. Grow, Jasper County Auditor and Tina Porter, Deputy Auditor. Please let the record show that Andrew Andree was absent. Mr. Bontreger called the meeting to order and those present stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Norwine.

MINUTES: Mr. Bontreger noticed that the date of the meeting needs corrected. It states 2107 instead of 2017. Mr. Jordan made a motion to approve the minutes from the Regular February 21, 2017 meeting as presented, with the noted correction. Mr. Risner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

VICKI BOZELL / TRI-COUNTY ELECTIONS: Mrs. Bozell was present to inform the Council that Tri-County School Corporation is having a School Election to try and raise a tax \$0.2737 on every taxable \$100.00. This will be voted for on May 2, 2017. She said that she did not budget for an election this year; however, Tri-County School Corporation will be paying all costs involved with the election. She will be requesting Additional Appropriations in the amount of \$5,688.00 at April's meeting in case something happens and Tri-County does not end up paying, although that amount is a high estimate. If Tri-County does not pay, Mrs. Bozell will have to pay the workers. Mr. Bontreger asked if this amount would need appropriated in April and then Tri-County would reimburse. Mrs. Bozell replied "Yes". She said since the school is trying to make money, she's limited their voting hours to a minimum while staying within the legal limits. She's combined two polling locations in to one and is only using one Absentee Board and one Poll Worker Board. There will not be any expenses incurred for the location since it will be held at the Remington Library.

She informed the Council that the voting machines have been picked up and are currently being refurbished in Indianapolis. They are getting new screens and new hardware.

ALCOHOL BEVERAGE COMMISSION: Mr. Bontreger, Mr. DeVries, Mr. Jordan, Mr. Fritts and Mr. Norwine signed Shelli Risner's Certificate of Appointment. Mr. Risner abstained.

MARK SINCLAIR / USE OF DONATION FUND / TRANSFER REQUEST: Mr. Sinclair was present to request the use of \$1,892.00 from the Animal Shelter Donation Fund to purchase security cameras for the shelter. Approximately every three weeks, they have animals that are dropped off after hours without the owner going through the proper procedures or following policy. The cameras would also cover the back part of the lot, which is an area that is hard for the employees to see. Mr. Fritts mentioned the \$392.00 price difference between the quotes from Rick Johnson and Affordable Sound & Security and asked Mr. Sinclair if he did his due diligence and if he feels that he's getting a better product with Affordable Sound & Security. Mr. Sinclair cited the fact that there is no warranty on the equipment from Mr. Johnson as his reason for not wanting to purchase from him. Affordable Sound & Security is offering a one year warranty on the installation and a three year warranty on the equipment. Del Cleek added that Affordable Sound will also be offering training for the employees. In response to Mr. Fritts' question about recordability, Mr. Sinclair replied that the Affordable Sound equipment will record fourteen to twenty-one days before it records over itself and Mr. Johnson's will only record for five to seven days. The quote includes five cameras and originally included the monitor, but they are able to use Mr. Sinclair's computer instead. Ms. Cleek added that it can also be accessed from a smartphone. Mr. Sinclair said that the cameras zoom in three times, times three. While Mr. Sinclair was being shown the system, a car happened to pull up and he said you could see the person as clearly as you would if you were standing in the parking lot. In regards to the quote from ADT, Mr. Sinclair said they did not consider it because there is a \$132.00 monthly fee, although it would come with a lifetime warranty. ADT also gave the option of a panic button for the front desk, but that would add another \$17.00 per month. The ADT service would have been monitored by Rensselaer City Police or the Jasper County Sheriff's Department. Mr. Risner commented that he thinks Mr. Sinclair did his due diligence.

MARK SINCLAIR / USE OF DONATION FUND / TRANSFER REQUEST CONT'D:

Mr. Fritts asked Mr. Sinclair how much money is in the Donation Fund, to which he replied that there is \$23,500 in the account. Mr. Fritts said that it seems that this is a good use of the money.

Auditor Grow asked if the money was earmarked for anything specific when it was donated and Ms. Cleek replied that it was not. The money that is donated for something specific is kept separate. Mr. Risner made a motion to approve the use of the Animal Shelter Donation Fund money in the amount of \$1,892.00 to purchase security equipment. Mr. Fritts seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Sinclair requested a transfer in the amount of \$550.00 from Animal (Rendering) Pick-up to Furniture and Equipment for the purchase of a washing machine. Mr. DeVries made a motion to approve the transfer request. Mr. Norwine seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

LOCAL INCOME TAX: Mr. Bontreger stated that there is time set aside for income tax discussion and he welcomes any thoughts on the subject. Mr. DeVries brought a hand-out showing the 2016 Transition for LOIT. Mr. Bontreger stated that, based on previous experience, it seems like it takes a couple years to fully realize the effects of the decisions the Council makes regarding the income tax. He thinks they are still seeing how things will turn out based on the adjustments that were made a few years ago. He did some research and found that more counties are considering use of the local income tax.

Mr. Fritts stated that, since 2014, thirty-seven percent of the counties have raised their local income tax rates. We are the only county that's lowered the rate in the last three years. Jasper County is in the top ten for the local income tax rate, but is in the lowest ten for the lowest property tax rate. He said there is only one other county in the State that is in the same bracket. He said our low property taxes are offset by the local income tax. Out of the counties that are in the top ten, five have raised their tax rates in the last three years. Jasper County was able to lower the rate two years ago. The property tax situation over the last three years shows that taxes are going up. He said that he is an advocate for defending the lower property taxes because it encourages ownership. He said, since lowering the income tax, we will have to see how it transitions over time. The Property Tax Replacement Credit, which is directly related to the local income tax, has decreased over the last five years. He said that trying to decipher how much the taxpayers are actually paying and how much is being distributed back to the County is confusing. He would like more transparency from the State and would also like to know how much they are holding in the Stabilization Fund. He said the County is paying in twenty million dollars plus per year.

Mr. Jordan asked if there is a two year lag on the money coming back and Auditor Grow replied that that's her understanding.

Mr. Risner questioned how the County would know what's coming back from the Stabilization Fund and how a budget could be set when we don't know the amount that's coming back. He also questioned if the healthcare plan goes through nationwide and is put on the State, is the State going to capitalize the money. He said there are a lot of questions.

Mr. Norwine said that what concerns him is with Senate Bill 308, which the County had no control over. Some agricultural land property taxes are coming down, but it's being shifted and other people's property taxes are going up. He said, per the Assessor Mrs. Hoffman, property tax assessments are trending up across the County approximately two to five percent due to sales. He said we are in a transition and he's not sure we have good numbers yet.

Mr. Fritts said that the assessed valuation on farmland is going to come down so we will lose some assessed valuation over the next two to three years, which increases rates. He believes that property taxes will naturally continue to go up. When levies increase, the rate goes up. He said we will see what happens and that he doesn't know if the County is in a position to lower the local income tax. It appears that, across the State, there is a movement towards Local Income Tax, with some counties jumping from the mid ones to the mid two's in the last three years. Mr. DeVries stated that there is concern that the level of the County General Fund balance has been declining.

LOCAL INCOME TAX CONT'D: Jasper County Government Services that are provided for the citizens are funded by income tax and property tax. He believes there is a disproportionate dependence on revenue derived from income tax as compared to property tax. Our income tax is the third highest in the State, but we are one of the lowest for property tax. Mr. Bontreger stated that we are fourth lowest. Mr. DeVries stated that income tax revenue is much more variable and uncertain than property tax revenue because of the many factors that come in to play, such as people changing jobs or relocating out of the County. With the closure of St. Joseph's College, there will be a significant decrease in taxable income with the loss of a good number of jobs and income tax being paid by these employees, along with the ripple effect it will have on a host of businesses. The income tax will undoubtedly be less than it was. It is nearly impossible to determine how much money the County will need to generate using and depending upon the income tax. He questioned whether it's time that the Council move to re-evaluate the tax revenue program we have in Jasper County, meaning the high income tax and low property tax. He said the last time he counted, there were thirty counties that had adopted either the LOIT A, B or C. Some of them are raising the rates because they started very low, whereas Jasper County started very high.

Mr. Fritts questioned how the Stabilization Fund is going to pan out for the County. There are a lot of variables to consider.

Mr. DeVries said that the County has been very careful with funds, but expenses keep rising.

Mr. Fritts stated that we will potentially be losing a large amount of revenue due to the college closing, but there will be a natural increase in property taxes due to the Property Tax Replacement Credit.

Mr. Bontreger asked Mrs. Porter to put Local Income Tax on the agenda for April to keep the conversation going until it comes time to vote on it.

JASPER COUNTY FARM LEASES: Auditor Grow presented copies of the farm leases that the Commissioners awarded at their March 6, 2016 meeting for Mr. Bontreger's signature.

DEL CLEEK / USE OF DONATION FUND: Del Cleek was present with Nancy Shull and Janice Mallory. Ms. Cleek presented a letter to the Council explaining that they are here to request permission to use \$4,000.00 of the Donation Fund to give Mr. Sinclair a bonus. She said that, according to research found online, his wage is that of a shelter worker and not a manager. She said that he showed due diligence while looking for a security system and he and his wife spend time at the shelter that they don't get paid for. She said that, since Mr. Sinclair was hired, there has been a two-hundred percent improvement. She said everyone on the Board is in favor of the bonus. She stated that Mr. Sinclair brought in \$8,579.00 to the shelter in 2016. Prior to his hiring, all the animals that came to the shelter were sent to a rescue and there was no money being made. Mr. Bontreger asked Auditor Grow if they would approach this the way that Soil and Water is set up. She replied that they would probably want to talk to the Commissioners about it. He told Ms. Cleek that, based on County policy, the Commissioners essentially make the policy. The Council does set the salaries and it's important that the Board brings this to their attention; however, he advised Ms. Cleek to get on the Commissioners agenda. He explained that "bonus" might not be the proper term for what the Board is wanting to do. It might be something such as an agreement where the County pays him a certain level and the Board would have to be the funding source for anything above and beyond that every year. He further said that she would need to address this with the Commissioners to make sure that type of thing would be ok. He agreed that Mr. Sinclair is doing a good job. He told Ms. Cleek if they get the Commissioners approval, then they can come back and present it to the Council. Ms. Cleek said that they were looking at giving the bonus once, not recurring yearly, although they would like to approach requesting a raise on annual basis. She said the Board doesn't think that Mr. Sinclair started out at the correct pay since it was based on the previous employee, who was not being paid as a director. Ms. Cleek sad she thought this was something they could do for him to fill in the gap. Mr. Bontreger said that there may be a better way to term this, such as defraying some expenses he's incurring, as opposed to calling it a bonus.

DEL CLEEK / USE OF DONATION FUND CONT'D: He told her that the Board will need input from the Commissioners and if the Board is unanimous, it's important to convey that to the Commissioners. He said minutes or any other documentation they can provide would be helpful. Mr. Bontreger thanked her for including the Council and said that the shelter is much more professional and presentable than it has been. He also commented that it helps to have a well-organized Board supporting Mr. Sinclair's efforts. Mr. Risner agreed that presenting the minutes to the Commissioners would be helpful.

KEVIN KELLY / JCEDO UPDATE: Mr. Kelly stated that the Tourism Commission has awarded approximately \$40,000.00 to various festival groups. The committees that are awarded money submit letter requests at the beginning of the year. The new Director of Tourism and Community Relations starts on Monday, March, 27<sup>th</sup>. On the Economic Development side, they are continuing to market, which consists of emailing slightly less than 3,000 fliers a month to the commercial office industrial real estate brokerage community from Indianapolis to the Chicagoland area. He said this is something they've been doing for years. The list has been built over time and is refreshed regularly. Every quarter they email about the same number of fliers to industrial companies in the same geographical area. The industrial contacts do not generate as many leads. For larger, mid-western or national projects, they rely on the Indiana Economic Development Corporation as well as the Northwest Indiana Forum that they are members of. They also network with the Indiana Manufacturer's Association and Indiana Chambers. Mr. Kelly said he makes fourteen business visits per month, some being repeat visits while others are new. The monthly e-newsletter is sent out to approximately one-thousand two hundred and fifty per month. They participate in local Chamber activities and keep in contact with the real estate community. He said the problem is that we don't have that many prime, large industrial, commercial-type properties to market. Mr. Bontreger asked if they were able to re-create the files that they had with South Shore. Mr. Kelly replied that he is going to have to hire a designer. He's received a few bids and will begin working on it next week. The Jasper County Visitor's Guide needs to be replicated. It is currently three-fold and he would like to consider adding a fourth fold. He said they've committed to the festivals that they will do the post cards and posters.

There being no further business and no public comment, Mr. DeVries made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Fritts seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

---

Rein O. Bontreger, President

ATTEST:

---

Kimberly K. Grow, Auditor of Jasper County